

# The role of islands in Baja California's prehistory

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The numerous islands located off both coasts of the Baja California peninsula offer unique and strikingly varied vantage points for viewing the region's prehistory. Among the themes that can be addressed by the islands' archaeology are the Pleistocene origins of human settlement on the continent, subsequent interregional connections, the place of the islands within larger settlement systems, responses to the technological challenge of getting to the islands, the exploitation of specialized insular and maritime resources, sustainability in resource use, and the ideological significance attributed to islands.

The states of Baja California and Baja California Sur contain at least 91 islands that are large enough or significant enough to have been given names (Figure 1). Numerous smaller islands and offshore rocks also exist. Thirty-nine of the named islands are on the Pacific coast (Table 1), while 52 are in the Gulf of California (Table 2). At least 33 of the islands are presently known to have seen native occupation, as testified by ethnohistoric reports and archaeological observations (Figure 2), and most of the others were probably also visited.

The islands of Baja California are highly diverse. They range from tiny specks of dry land to an extensive landform up to nearly 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> in area, and from low-lying expanses of sand to steep escarpments and rocky peaks. Collectively, they represent a category with unique importance in understanding the prehistory of human activity on the peninsula. This paper briefly discusses several aspects of the islands' research potential.

## **Pleistocene origins**

According to the Coastal Hypothesis, a model for New World settlement that is being given increasing attention by archaeologists, the first immigrants into the Americas south of Alaska did not wait for the opening of an ice-free corridor into the Great Plains between the Laurentide and Cordilleran glaciers, as had previously been supposed by the Clovis First Hypothesis. Instead, the Coastal Hypothesis suggests that the immigrants traveled rapidly down the Pacific coast, skirting the western margin of the Cordilleran ice sheet at least partly by using watercraft, and perhaps reaching southern Chile, more than 10,000 km distant, within a few millennia after their initial entry (e.g., Erlandson et al. 2007). If the Coastal Hypothesis is correct, the archaeology of Baja California's islands may offer pivotal research opportunities for discovering and analyzing these events.

Baja California lay directly on the coastal route south into the Americas, rather than being merely peripheral to settlement that spread outward from the mid-continent, as proposed in the Clovis First Hypothesis. Some of the peninsula's islands are logical places to look for evidence of very early occupations, given their proximity to the coastlines of the late Pleistocene, when sea level stood as much as 100 m and at least 55 m below than its modern level (Masters and Aiello 2007).

The implications of the Coastal Hypothesis are most apparent for the islands off Baja



Figure 1. Named islands off the Baja California and Baja California Sur coasts.

California's western coast, but they also hold true for the islands in the southern and central parts of the Gulf of California. As R. James Hills has noted, once coastal migrants had reached the peninsula's Cape Region, their likely route forward would not have been to attempt to cross directly over to the distant Mexican mainland, which would not have been visible (Bowen 2009b:84). Instead, it is likely that they would have continued to follow Baja California's coast northward into the gulf, at least as far as the Midriff Islands of San Lorenzo and Ángel de la Guarda.

Submerged areas near modern islands offer promising locations to look for early archaeological sites that were subsequently inundated by the rising Holocene seas. Sites in locations to the lee of islands may have been relatively sheltered from wave action and less subject to destruction by the rising waters than were more exposed locations along open sections of the coastline.

In general, insular fauna and flora are particularly vulnerable to impacts from both natural

Table 1. Evidence for aboriginal use of named islands off the Pacific coast of Baja California and Baja California Sur.

<b>Island</b>	<b>Evidence of Aboriginal Use</b>	<b>References</b>
Islas Coronados - North Island	archaeological	May and Ike 1981
Islas Coronados - Middle Rock	--	--
Islas Coronados - Middle Island	--	--
Islas Coronados - South Island	archaeological	May and Ike 1981
Islas Todos Santos	archaeological	Hohenthal 2001:79, 288
Isla San Martín	ethnohistoric, archaeological	J. Serrano, personal communication 2009; Bolton 1908:20; Wagner 1929:83
Isla San Gerónimo	ethnohistoric	Bolton 1908:72
Islote Piedra de San José	--	--
Isla Guadalupe	--	--
Isla El Toro	--	--
Isla El Zapato	--	--
Isla Adelaida / Elide	--	--
Islas San Benito	archaeological	Bancroft 1932:90-91
Isla Cedros	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Banks 1970, 1972, 1978; Des Lauriers 2005a, 2006a, 2006b
Isla Natividad	ethnohistoric (hearsay)	Des Lauriers and Des Lauriers 2006:129-130
Islote Chester Rock	--	--
Islote Piedra Negra	--	--
Islote Zacatoso	--	--
Islote La Concha	--	--
Islote El Alambre	--	--
Islote La Piedra	--	--
Islote La Choyita	--	--
Islotes Los Morros	--	--
Islotes Morro Hermoso	--	--
Isla San Roque	ethnohistoric	Wagner 1929:397
Isla Asunción	ethnohistoric	Wagner 1929:213
Islas Zopilotes - Isla Garzas	--	--
Islas Zopilotes - Isla Pelicanos	--	--
Islote Abaroa	--	--
Isla Ana	--	--
Isla Santo Domingo	--	--
Islote San Gil	--	--
Islote Pauquino	--	--
Islas El Conchal	--	--
Isla Magalena	ethnohistoric	Guillén 1979:53; Wagner 1929:80
Isla Pajaros (Patos)	--	--
Isla Mangrove	--	--
Isla Santa Margarita	ethnohistoric, archaeological	T. Jones, personal communication 2009; Wagner 1929:30-37
Isla Creciente	--	--

Table 2. Evidence for Aboriginal Use of Named Islands off the Gulf of California Coast of Baja California and Baja California Sur.

<b>Island</b>	<b>Evidence of Aboriginal Use</b>	<b>References *</b>
Isla Consag	--	--
Isla El Huerfanito	--	--
Isla El Muerto	--	--
Isla Lobos / Coloradito	--	--
Isla La Encantada / Cholluda	--	--
Isla San Luis / La Encantada / Salvatierra	archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla San Luis Gonzaga	--	--
Isla Mejía	archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla Granito	--	--
Isla Ángel de la Guarda	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Arnold 1957; Bowen 2009a, 2009b; Bowen et al. 2005; Ives 1963
Isla Alcatraz	--	--
Isla Estanque	archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla El Piojo	archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla El Borrego	--	--
Isla Coronado	archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla La Ventana	--	--
Isla Cabeza de Caballo	--	--
Islas Gemelitos	--	--
Isla Partida	archaeological	Bowen 2009a, 2009b
Isla Cardinosa Este	none reported	Bowen 2009b
Isla Raza	none reported	Bowen 2009a, 2009b
Isla Salsipuedes	archaeological	Bowen 2009a, 2009b
Isla Las Animas	archaeological	Bowen 2009a, 2009b
Isla San Lorenzo	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009a, 2009b
Isla Tortuga	none reported	Bowen 2009b
Isla San Marcos	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla Santa Inés	--	--
Isla San Ildefonso	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla Coronados	archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla del Carmen	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla Danzante	archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Islotes Las Galeras	--	--
Isla Monserrat	ethnohistoric	Bowen 2009b
Isla Santa Catalina	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla Santa Cruz	none reported	Bowen 2009b
Isla Morena	--	--
Isla San Diego	--	--
Isla La Habana	--	--
Isla Las Animas	--	--
Isla San José	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla San Francisco	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b
Isla Los Islotes	--	--
Isla La Partida	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b; Fujita 2006; Fujita and Poyatos 1998
Isla Ballena	--	--
Isla Gallo y Gallina	--	--
Isla Espíritu Santo	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b; Fujita 2006, 2008; Fujita and Poyatos 1998

Island	Evidence of Aboriginal Use	References *
Islas de las Focas	--	--
Isla San Lorenzo Norte	--	--
Isla San Lorenzo Sur	--	--
Isla Cerralvo	ethnohistoric, archaeological	Bowen 2009b; Fujita 2006
Isla Cerro Blanco	--	--
Isla Cerro La Bufadora	--	--

\* Detailed ethnohistoric and unpublished archaeological references are provided in Bowen 2009b.

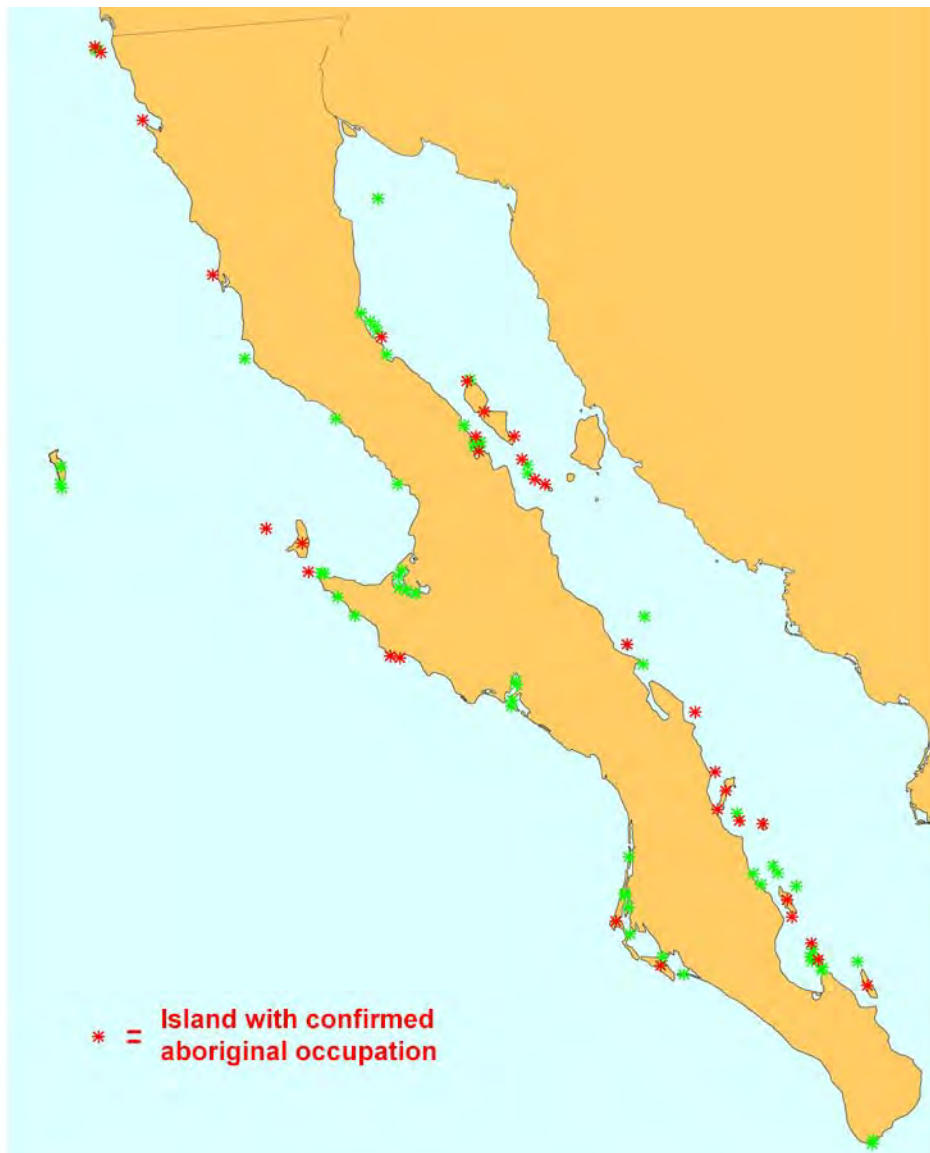


Figure 2. Islands with aboriginal occupation confirmed by archaeological and/or ethnohistoric evidence.

and human forces. Consequently, tendencies toward extinctions at the end of the Pleistocene may have been heightened on Baja California's islands. Human immigrants during the late Pleistocene may have found and exploited (or overexploited) insular resources that subsequently ceased to be available to the immigrants' Holocene successors. If so, Pleistocene use of the islands may have been more extensive than their use during subsequent periods. Pleistocene archaeological sites may be easier to distinguish on islands than on the peninsula, where they would be more likely to be overlaid by or mixed with later cultural deposits.

Archaeological evidence of island use dating back at least to the Pleistocene/Holocene transition period has already been obtained in the form of early radiocarbon dates reported from Isla Cedros and Isla Espíritu Santo, as well as by a Clovis point found on Isla Cedros (Des Lauriers 2006b; Fujita 2006, 2008). However, as Thomas Bowen (2009b:83) has noted, both Cedros and Espíritu Santo had dry-land connections to the peninsula during the late Pleistocene; consequently, their early occupations do not necessarily imply that maritime travel across to islands occurred during that period.

### **Interregional connections**

Prehistorically, the Baja California peninsula was firmly linked culturally along its northern margin with the North American mainland. However, an ongoing research issue has concerned the degree to which the central and southern peninsula may have experienced an unusual degree of cultural isolation during prehistoric times (cf. Laylander 2006). The islands are significant areas in which to investigate this issue.

The most obvious region in which to address the question of extra-peninsular contacts is the Midriff Islands, including San Lorenzo and Ángel de la Guarda in Baja California and San Esteban and Tiburón in Sonora. Spanning the central Gulf of California, the Midriff Islands provided potential stepping-stones between Baja California and the Mexican mainland. Alfred L. Kroeber (1931) suggested the possible origin of the Sonora coast's Seri Indians on the Baja California peninsula. Makoto Kowta (1984) argued that the archaeological record for Baja California prior to around 2000 B.C. suggested that the peninsula had stronger cultural connections with the east than with areas to the north. Bowen (2009a, 2009b; Bowen et al. 2005) has examined evidence from archaeology, ethnohistoric accounts, and Seri ethnography concerning the Midriff Islands and their prehistoric links with Sonora and Baja California. Questions that are not yet fully answered concern the chronological periods during which these islands may have been occupied or abandoned, as well as the social units that were involved in their occupations (for instance, whole communities, specialized task groups, or transient travelers/traders). Of particular importance are the ethnic identities of the islands' occupants; for instance, were they Cochimí or Seri speakers? Among the promising means to address the question of ethnic identity may be the archaeological distributions of ceramics with distinctive attributes, such as Tiburón Plain, and of raw materials that are traceable to known sources, such as the obsidian from Isla Ángel de la Guarda.

Another question concerns whether prehistoric southern Baja California experienced any contacts with the peoples and cultures to the east, in west-central Mexico. William C. Massey (1955, 1961) noted similarities in atlatls and in burial customs between the cape region and mainland areas even as far afield as northern South America. If there were direct contacts between west-central Mexico and the cape region, the likely locations for those interactions may have been the islands of the southern Gulf, such as Cerralvo, Espíritu Santo, and San José. The contacts would

presumably have occurred long after the cape region had been initially settled, and it might have been safer for long-distance travelers to meet with their local counterparts on islands, rather than venturing onto the peninsula itself. Europeans, in their worldwide ventures from the fifteenth century A.D. onward, often employed a similar strategy of using island bases as trading stations. It is doubtful whether any such interactions between the cape region and the Mexican mainland did in fact occur, and it is perhaps also unlikely that any fleeting contacts would have left archaeologically discoverable traces, but the hypothesis may be worth considering.

Even more tenuous are the links sometimes proposed between Baja California and Melanesia. Based on supposed physiological similarities between cape region (Las Palmas burial complex) skeletal remains and the Melanesians, Herman ten Kate in the late nineteenth century, Paul Rivet in the early twentieth century, and some subsequent investigators have suggested the existence of genetic links between these far-distant populations (González-José et al. 2003; Pompa 1977; Rivet 1909; ten Kate 1884; but see also González and Huddart 2007). Enrique Hambleton (1979) similarly proposed a Melanesian connection for the Great Mural rock art of the peninsula's central desert. On the basis of present evidence, such trans-Pacific voyaging appears very unlikely, but if it did occur, such voyagers might also have favored the use of insular landfalls.

A controversial recent proposal has suggested that late prehistoric Polynesians arrived on the coast of southern California and influenced the development of watercraft technology in the Santa Barbara Channel area (Jones and Klar 2005). If Polynesians did venture as far as the western coast of North America, the islands along Baja California's west coast, such as Cedros, might also be reasonable places locations at which to look for their archaeological traces.

## **Settlement systems**

Were the prehistoric communities in Baja California largely sedentary, or were they highly mobile? Were most resources consumed at the outlying areas where they were harvested, or were they carried back to base settlements? Islands potentially offer particular insights into how prehistoric settlement systems were organized within the wider social landscapes.

Permanent, year-round settlement could probably have been sustained on only a few of the region's larger, better-watered islands. Notable among these are Cedros and Espiritu Santo (Des Lauriers 2005a, 2006a; Fujita 2006; Fujita and Poyatos 1998). The majority of Baja California's islands would likely only have been visited for short periods, and possibly only by task-specific groups. The archaeological signatures of such non-residential activities may stand out more clearly on the islands than they do at sites on the peninsula: on the islands, traces may be less likely to be overlaid by and confused with remains from transit camps or from dispersed community residential settlements.

Because of the efforts that were involved in getting to and from most of the islands, they are unlikely to have served as logistical base camps at which resources from the peninsula would be collected. Materials brought from the peninsula to the islands are likely to have been limited to those that were needed for immediate use or consumption by the temporary occupants. In most cases (again with the exceptions of Cedros and Espiritu Santo), materials collected at an island site are likely to have come from the island itself or its surrounding waters. This pattern may make the archaeological record at island sites easier to interpret than is true for many of the sites on the peninsula.

## Technology: watercraft

Islands created a special incentive for native groups to develop and use seaworthy watercraft. Some near-shore islands could have been reached easily by swimming, and most others were potentially accessible by using simple log rafts or balsas. Nonetheless, many of Baja California's islands could only be reached by crossing over several kilometers of open, often rough seas. The lure of traveling to the islands, added to the advantages of seaworthy watercraft for fishing off the peninsular coasts, may have stimulated the development of more elaborate boats in some areas.

Tule balsas were the prevalent watercraft along most parts of the California coasts. Robert F. Heizer and William C. Massey (1953) recognized four areas where more substantial wooden watercraft had been used, according to ethnohistoric accounts: Cabo San Lucas, Isla Cedros, the Channel Islands of southern Alta California, and the northwest coast of Alta California. In three of these cases, an association between elaborate watercraft and islands may be suggested. The exception is northwestern Alta California, a region where native adaptations were focused on exploiting the salmon and other fish resources of large rivers. (The only navigable river in Baja California was the Colorado River, in the extreme northeast, where simple watercraft seem to have sufficed.) Northwestern Alta California also enjoyed the advantage of local supplies of redwood, a prime material for boatbuilding. At Isla Cedros, the potential importance of wooden vessels in maintaining a connection between the island and the peninsula, more than 20 km distant, is evident. Cedros and its vicinity also possessed the advantage of being supplied through the California current with large amounts of driftwood suitable for boatbuilding. In the Cape Region, the Pericú use of wooden rafts was reported at Cabo San Lucas. It is true that this is a location without substantial nearby islands. However, the Pericú also occupied the islands of Cerralvo, Espíritu Santo, La Partida, and San José, and the Pericú's maritime orientation at Cabo San Lucas may have been ultimately connected with the same ethnic group's exploitation of those islands.

On Isla Cedros, Matthew Des Lauriers (2005a, 2005b, 2008) reported finding two apparent archaeological remnants of wooden boats. Worked cedar and redwood logs, 3 and 4 m in length, may have formed the keels of watercraft that were intermediate in complexity between the ubiquitous tule balsas of the Californias and the more elaborate plank *tomols* of the Santa Barbara Channel. Further archaeological investigations on Baja California's islands may make additional finds that will shed light on the geographical scope and chronology for the use of relatively substantial and elaborate watercraft.

Beyond the technology itself, the use of elaborate watercraft has possible implications concerning prehistoric social structure. Most of the elements of aboriginal technology in the Californias were relatively simple. They could represent merely production for use by the individuals who manufactured them. Substantial, multi-passenger watercraft may have constituted an important exception. There may have been neither the opportunity nor a necessity for every male head of household to build his own boat. Instead, boats may have been built and owned collectively by the community, or else (perhaps more likely) they may have been commissioned and owned by "big men," who thereby created or asserted an exceptional personal prestige. In this way, the use of substantial watercraft, and thus, indirectly, the occupation of islands, may have exerted a pressure favoring the emergence of stronger community cohesion and greater social inequality in prehistoric Baja California. Archaeological investigations may be able to determine whether or not groups that lived on or visited islands showed greater tendencies toward social inequality, for instance as evidenced in their burial practices and nutrition, and whether those



tendencies tended to diffuse to their more terrestrially oriented neighbors.

### **Exploitation of insular and marine resources**

The islands of Baja California formed an important component of the resource base that was available for exploitation by the region's prehistoric inhabitants. Some resources were more easily available or more plentiful on the islands than on the peninsula, while others may have been unique to island settings.

As a rule, the terrestrial plant communities on the islands were probably similar to but more limited in diversity than the communities on the adjacent peninsula, and they were probably less valued as potential resources. However, there may have been exceptions. At least 25 plant taxa are reported to be endemic to Baja California's islands in the Gulf of California (Rebman 2002). No cases have been identified as yet in which such endemics had a high or unique value for prehistoric inhabitants, but this does not necessarily mean that cases did not exist or will not be discovered.

The terrestrial faunas of the islands seem to be more attenuated than the flora, because of the terrestrial species' greater difficulties in reaching the islands and in establishing viable breeding populations on sometimes-small plots of land. The pygmy deer of Isla Cedros (*Odocoileus hemionus cerrosensis*) may have been a minor exception as an important resource. It is possible that an absence of natural terrestrial predators may have made some fauna more accessible to human exploitation on islands than on the peninsula.

Turning from terrestrial to marine-oriented faunal resources, the island/peninsula ranking is reversed, and the potential richness of the islands is evident. Sea birds established rookeries on islands or oceanic rocks where they were safe from most terrestrial predators but where they were vulnerable to human hunters seeking their meat or eggs. Sea mammals, particularly species that beached themselves, would have been a prime island resource (cf. Des Lauriers 2006a:159-161). Shellfish were available and exploited on many islands, although whether the islands' shellfish resources were distinct from or richer than the populations on the peninsula's shores is uncertain. In many cases, islands would have provided convenient land bases for pursuing the rich offshore stocks of fish and marine mammals.

Inorganic resources may also have drawn people to a few islands. Most evident are the obsidian sources on Isla Ángel de la Guarda (Bowen 2009b:67) and perhaps on Isla San Luis (Ritter and Aceves 2006). The Islas de Todos Santos provided a source of chert that was exploited (Hohenthal 2001:288). One critical inorganic resource, fresh water, was probably less available on most islands than on the adjacent mainland. However, a notable exception was Isla Cedros, which reportedly contains "the best sources of fresh water for over two hundred kilometers north or south along the coast" (Des Lauriers 2005a:63).

### **Human impacts and sustainability**

The biological resources of Baja California were not static elements of the landscape, unchanging throughout the late Pleistocene and the Holocene. Nor did they change only in response to the vagaries of climate and the impetus of their own internal evolution. Humans were probably significant agents of environmental change. Islands may offer particularly useful laboratories in which to study such prehistoric human impacts.

Terrestrial plant and animal communities within insular settings, particularly on the smaller islands, would have been highly vulnerable to human impacts because of their degree of isolation

from mainland population reservoirs and the limited absolute size of the island populations. Late prehistoric human impacts on island biota are well documented for some of the Polynesian islands, such as Hawaii, New Zealand, and Easter Island (Diamond 2005; Martin and Klein 1984). The situation of Baja California islands was not closely analogous to the Polynesian cases, because the latter were primary settlement bases for often-large communities, which were relatively isolated from alternative resource areas. However, similar if less dramatic human impacts on Baja California's island biota were not unlikely.

An important research issue concerns the presence or absence of mechanisms that promoted sustainability in prehistoric practices of resource use. Some analysts have suggested that aboriginal peoples in many different regions recognized ideological mandates that prevented them from overexploiting the earth's resources (e.g., Martin 1978; Wilken-Robertson 1997). A certain amount of skepticism toward these claims may be warranted. In any case, the archaeological records of islands may be particularly well suited as test cases for addressing the issue of whether resources were being exploited on a sustainable basis, or whether they were overexploited and produced local extinctions or periodic population crashes in their fauna and flora.

Not all of the human impacts on island fauna and flora were necessarily negative or subtractive in character. Gary Nabhan (2002) suggested that the Seri of Sonora transplanted several species of cacti and iguanid lizards onto the eastern Midriff Islands, either unintentionally or intentionally. Similar enrichments of the local fauna and flora may well have occurred on Baja California's islands, although they have not yet been demonstrated. On Isla Cedros, Des Lauriers (2005a:371) suggested that an isolated pitahaya agria (*Machaerocereus gummosus*) plant is a relic from cactus fruit that was brought to the island from the peninsula, although in this case the introduced species evidently did not establish itself and spread more widely across the island.

## Islands in ideology

Aboriginal cultures have sometimes envisioned islands as special places. Islands' unmistakable separateness from the mainland marks them out as something distinct, and the challenges that were involved in reaching some islands may have tended to endow them with a perceived spiritual importance. However, at yet there is little evidence to confirm any such conceptions concerning Baja California's islands.

The available ethnohistoric testimony concerning native belief systems in central and southern Baja California is fairly limited because of the early extinction of native cultures in this region (Mathes 2006). Existing Jesuit and Dominican accounts of the peninsula's origins myths, migration legends, and religious practices do not single out islands as significant phenomena (Barco 1973; Sales 1956; Venegas 1979). This may reflect either a lack of such significance or the limitations in the ethnohistoric record.

The aboriginal beliefs of the Yuman-speaking peoples of northern Baja California and vicinity were much better documented by twentieth-century ethnographers (Wilken-Robertson and Laylander 2006). Several versions of the Diegueño (i.e., Ipai, Kumeyaay, or Tipai) creation myth refer to Maihaiowit, a great snake from whom the first people acquired their knowledge of songs, dances, and ceremonial speech. In a version of the myth recorded by Constance Goddard DuBois, Maihaiowit lived "far to the south ... in the islands of the ocean" (Laylander 2004:91). According to an account recorded by Thomas T. Waterman (1910:339-340), Maihaiowit lived in the ocean to the west, at Wicuwul, which Waterman thought might have been the Islas Coronados. However, other versions of the myth seem to locate Maihaiowit's home in or under the ocean to the south,

rather than on an island (Gifford 1918:172, 1931:78; Hedges 1970:32).

Harumi Fujita and Gema Poyatos de Paz (1998) reported the presence of funerary caves, pictograph sites, and trails on Isla Espíritu Santo, which they interpreted as evidence for an “ideological center” on the island. However, rather than indicating any special significance attached to the location as an island, these activities may merely reflect the role of the location as a substantial habitation base, similar to other habitation bases on the peninsula itself.

Many islands, including Cedros, San Luis, Mejía, Ángel de la Guarda, Estanque, Piojo, Coronado, Partida (norte), Salsipuedes, Las Ánimas, San Lorenzo, Santa Catalina, San José, Espíritu Santo, and Cerralvo, contain rock circles, rock alignments, clearings, talus pits, and cairns (see, in particular, Bowen 2009b). Such features may or may not have served merely utilitarian functions. On Isla San Lorenzo, in particular, radiating lines of rocks on the exterior of a large rock circle are strongly suggestive of some nonutilitarian, religious or ceremonial activity (Bowen 2009a:244, 2009b:57).

## Prospects

Important first steps have been taken in the archaeological investigation of Baja California’s islands. Intensive studies by Harumi Fujita on Isla Espíritu Santo and by Matt Des Lauriers on Isla Cedros are particularly notable. Tom Bowen has done much valuable reconnaissance work on many of the islands in the Gulf of California. Roy Pettus is developing plans for investigations on the Islas Coronados. Nonetheless, most of the region’s islands have as yet received no more than very cursory attention. Much research remains to be carried out on even the best-studied of the islands.

There may be some urgency in carrying out these investigations. Islands as a class of landforms are particularly vulnerable to natural destruction by marine erosion. On top of that, the heightened development of recreational boating along Baja California’s coasts is increasing the likelihood of vandalism to archaeological sites (Bowen 2004). Implementing measures for their protection is a difficult challenge. But if the points raised in this discussion are valid, they show that the islands’ particular perspective on regional prehistory is one that is too important to be lost.

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